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FOOD NEWS

FOR CONSUMERS

Volume 10 Number 1-2 Spring-Summer 1993

United States Department of Agriculture
Food Safety and Inspection Service

The New Food Label & You



See Minnie's Story . . . Page 6

FOOD NEWS

Spring-Summer 1993
Vol. 10, No. 1-2

Food News for Consumers is published by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, the agency charged with ensuring the safety, wholesomeness and proper labeling of the nation's meat and poultry supply. The magazine reports how FSIS acts to protect public safety, covering research findings and regulatory efforts important in understanding how the agency works and how consumers can protect themselves against foodborne illness.

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Now: Accurate Nutrition Labeling

A Message from FSIS Deputy Administrator for Regulatory Programs
Margaret O'K. Glavin

It is our mission at USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service to see that the nation's meat and poultry products are safe, wholesome and accurately labeled. That's our responsibility under federal law.

Now I'm proud to say we're expanding that mission in a vital new direction. We are saying meat and poultry labels must also give the product's nutritional profile.

Why? Because we know that what we eat has an important impact on our health. There are substances in food many Americans should limit—fat, cholesterol, etc. And there are other nutrients—certain vitamins and minerals—that physicians and dietitians tell us we're not getting enough of. The new labels will give people the information they need to make healthier diet choices.

Still, this new information may at first seem confusing. That's why FSIS is working with FDA, other USDA agencies and the broader food community to teach consumers how to use the new labels. This special issue is an important step. There are stories on how to read the new nutrition panel and interpret every section of the new label. There is a story with answers to questions consumers are asking today about the nutritional aspects of meat and poultry products.

For food writers and educators we've supplied a background piece, "Food Labeling and the Law," to explain which federal agencies are doing what and why. And for those trying to "explain" the new labels to the public, see "NEFLE News" for a list of other label education publications now or soon to be available.

It's been four years since 1989 when we first asked the National Academy of Sciences to verify how important solid nutrition labeling could be to the American public. Now, finally, you'll be seeing the fruits of our efforts. This year and next the new labels will be making their debut on grocery shelves.

I know it was worth the time and effort it took to get these nutrition labels to you. Please take the time to learn how to use them to stay healthy and keep your families healthy.



Ms. Glavin, who joined FSIS in 1982, is responsible for the proper labeling of meat and poultry products including the use of approved additives and packaging materials. She also heads compliance and program review activities.

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*Exception: Cartoon on p. 14 is copyrighted through United Feature Syndicate.

Answering Your Questions on Nutrition and Nutrition Labeling

by Barbara O'Brien, R.D.*

"How much is a gram?" "What do all those technical words and numbers on the label mean?"

USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline has been answering questions like these for some time. Now, of course, everyone has even more questions about how to interpret the nutrition information on the new food labels. Here are answers to the most common nutrition and labeling questions asked by Hotline callers.

Q How much is a gram (g)? If a food has 8 g of fat, what does that mean?

A A gram is a metric unit of measurement. There are 454 g in a pound. If you hold a regular metal paper clip in your hand, that is about what 1 g weighs.

There are 4 g of fat in a teaspoon. So a food with 8 g of fat has 2 teaspoons of fat.

Larger amounts of food may be labeled showing grams of fat per serving. For instance, if a bag of microwave popcorn has 5 g of fat per serving and contains 3 servings, eating the whole bag of popcorn would mean consuming 15 g of fat.

That could be $\frac{1}{4}$ of the total fat you would want to eat all day. To cut down on your fat intake, you could decide to buy a lower-fat popcorn, or, if this is your favorite brand, eat less and share it with friends or family.

Q When will we see these new labels?

A The new food labeling regulations were announced on January 6, 1993. While manufacturers have until July 1994 to meet the new requirements for processed meat and poultry products like hot dogs and chili, you are likely to see these new labels much sooner.

Q Will all meat and poultry products have new labels?

A Companies must put nutrition labels on processed products such as chili and hot dogs. They can choose to provide information on raw, single-ingredient meat and poultry products like fresh roast beef or raw chicken legs. This information may appear on labels, posters, pamphlets or videos in the store.

Q How can I tell the new labels from the old labels?

A The nutrition panel on the new labels will be headed by the words "Nutrition Facts" instead of "Nutrition Information Per Serving" as you see now. The format has been changed too. Nutrients must now be shown as a percent of the newly-developed Daily Values (DVs).

Daily Values are general reference figures to help you get some idea of what your overall daily intake of nutrients should be. They are simply a guide

to help consumers compare products and make more informed, healthy food choices (see article page 6.)

Q If a processed meat or poultry product is labeled "low sodium," how much sodium may it contain per serving? Will these words mean the same for all products?

A FDA oversees the labeling of all foods except meat and poultry, which are regulated by USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service. The definitions for low sodium, sodium-free or salt-free will be the same for all food products, whether regulated by FSIS or FDA.

A product labeled "low sodium" should contain less than 140 mg of sodium per serving; sodium-free" or "salt-free" products will have less than 5 mg of sodium per serving. The exact amount per serving can be found on the nutrition panel.

Q Are cholesterol and fat the same thing?

A No. Cholesterol is a soft, waxy substance found in foods of animal origin—meat, poultry, fish, milk and milk products and egg yolks. Plant foods like fruits, vegetables, grains and beans do not contain cholesterol.

While cholesterol in the food you eat may raise your blood cholesterol levels somewhat the saturated fats you eat can raise these levels even more, increasing your risk for heart disease.

*Registered Dietitian

Q How much fat can I have in my diet?

A That depends on the number of calories you eat. Most experts suggest that Americans limit fat in their diets to 30% or less of total calories.

For someone who consumes 1,600 calories a day, this would be about 53 g of fat. Someone who eats 2,500 calories a day could have about 83 g of fat.

Remember, though, the recommendation to limit fat to 30% of total calories applies to the diet over several days, and not to one meal or one food item.

Q Is there a difference between ground turkey and ground turkey meat?

A Ground turkey meat is just that—ground muscle meat with no skin included. It will be lower in total fat than **ground turkey**, which includes the accompanying skin. For example, 3½ oz. of cooked ground turkey has about 13 g of fat compared to about 5 g from the same amount of cooked ground turkey meat. ❖

For more information, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline, Washington, D.C., 800-535-4555. Washington, D.C. area callers, dial 202-720-3333. Hotline home economists and dietitians answer questions on the safe handling and storage of meat and poultry products, basic nutrition questions about meat and poultry products and the nutrition labeling of these items. The Hotline is staffed 10 to 4 weekdays, Eastern time. Food safety messages can be heard during off-hours.

Wound up in the complexities of the new food labels?



Nutritionists, educators, food and health writers—you can call us for help as you develop your plans to “communicate” the new label to consumers. Our database includes government, industry and other efforts to educate people on using the new labels.

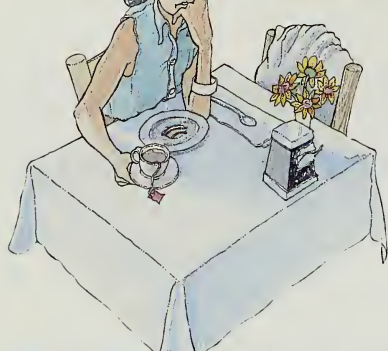
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301-504-5719

for the
Food Labeling Education
Information Center

Located at the National Agricultural Library,
the center is sponsored by FDA
and USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service

Using the New Nutrition Panel— *Minnie's Story*



Mrs. Minnie Loew, 47, had just come from the doctor's office. The news wasn't really bad...it just wasn't great either.

Like many middle-aged people, Minnie's cholesterol was a bit high. The doctor felt she needed to lose weight too. Her blood pressure was edging up, and he said losing 10 pounds should help get both the cholesterol and the blood pressure back under control.

After consoling herself with a cup of tea and a **small** cookie, Minnie decided it was time to face a new way of grocery shopping. Yes, she knew she should mostly be broiling, steaming and baking foods, but tonight she just wasn't up to it. What could she find in the way of a diet frozen dinner that would match the doctor's orders?

A new brand caught her eye—Diet Olé. She liked the lovely Flamenco dancer on the cover. Their Chicken Enchilada Dinner sounded

good. Okay. The dietitian who worked with Minnie's doctor had said to check the new nutrition panel on the back of the package.



She found it. It was a long box called “**Nutrition Facts.**”

Let’s see. **Serving Size**, 12 oz., nearly a pound. Should be filling and the picture on the other side looked good—chicken in tortillas over rice, corn and peppers with pineapple salsa or sauce. It said 1 serving per container. That made it easier. The figures that followed were based on the whole dinner.

Minnie knew that since she was dieting she had to look at the details. **Calories**, 340. Very good. Just about what she could afford for a single meal.

Daily Value . . . what had the dietitian said? Oh yes, a 100% was as much as you could have of things you should limit. But you should try for 100% of carbohydrate, fiber, protein and the vitamins.

She had to limit **fat, cholesterol and sodium**. But this dinner was still just fine. Fat at

Nutrition Facts

Serving Size 12 oz. (340g)
Servings Per Container 1

Amount Per Serving

Calories 340 Calories from Fat 45

% Daily Value*

Total Fat 5g	8%
Saturated Fat 2g	10%
Cholesterol 30mg	10%
Sodium 470mg	20%
Total Carbohydrate 61g	20%
Dietary Fiber 5g	20%
Sugars 2-3g	

Protein 14g

Vitamin A 10%	Vitamin C 35%
Calcium 15%	Iron 10%

* Percent Daily Values are based on a 2,000 calorie diet. Your daily values may be higher or lower depending on your calorie needs:

		Calories: 2,000	2,500
Total Fat	Less than	65g	80g
Sat Fat	Less than	20g	25g
Cholesterol	Less than	300mg	300mg
Sodium	less than	2,400mg	2,400mg
Total Carbohydrate		300g	375g
Dietary Fiber		25g	30g

Calories per gram:
Fat 9 • Carbohydrate 4 • Protein 4

8%, saturated fat at 10%, cholesterol at 10% and sodium at 20%.

Things she needed to boost—**carbohydrates, protein and vitamins** were all good too. She liked the 35% of Vitamin C.

Minnie understood that the **Daily Value guide** was based on a 2,000 calorie diet. She was on a 1,400 calorie diet, but that just meant she should choose foods in the lower percentages for fat, cholesterol and sodium.

Her husband Ralph, who worked in construction, could probably have **more** total **calories**, she decided, but it wouldn’t hurt him to watch fat, cholesterol and sodium either. In fact, it wouldn’t hurt Ralph to lose a little weight. With an evil glint in her eye, Minnie bought carrots for a low-fat, egg-whites-only carrot soufflé. Ralph hated carrots! ❖

—Mary Ann Parmley

Understanding the New Meat & Poultry Labels

by Marianne H. Gravely

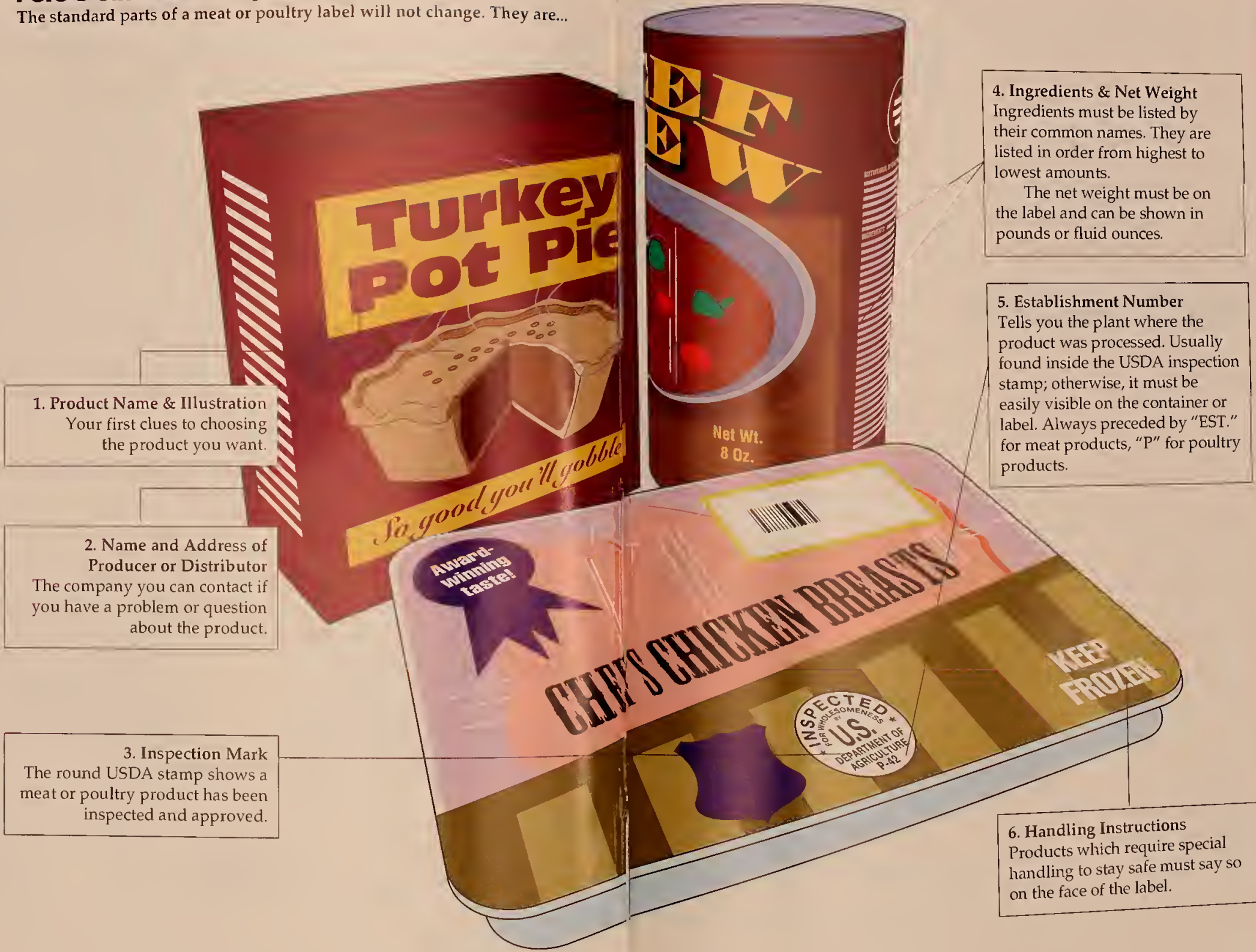
While the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) handles labeling on approximately 70% of the food items you find in the grocery store, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service approves the labels on the other 30%—meat and poultry products.

What's new about the new meat and poultry labels? Like FDA's labels, USDA's labels will soon carry a revised nutrition panel (see p. 6).

USDA has also carefully defined permissible nutrient content claims. This should eliminate confusion and assure consumers that the claims are consistent for all products. See box

FSIS's Six Label Requirements

The standard parts of a meat or poultry label will not change. They are...



New Nutrient Content Claims

Let's look at what these new definitions will mean to consumers.

•**Free** — The product contains only a tiny or insignificant amount of fat, cholesterol, sodium, sugar and/or calories. For example, a "fat-free" product will contain less than 0.5 grams of fat per serving.

•**Low** — A food described as "low" in fat, saturated fat, cholesterol, sodium and/or calories could be eaten fairly often without exceeding dietary guidelines. So "low in fat" means no more than 3 grams of fat per serving.

•**Lean** — "Lean" and "Extra Lean" are USDA terms for use on meat and poultry products. "Lean" means the product contains less than 10 grams of fat, 4 grams of saturated fat and 95 mg of cholesterol per serving. "Lean" is not as lean as "low."

•**Extra Lean** — "Extra Lean" means the product has less than 5 grams of fat, 2 grams of saturated fat, and 95 mg of cholesterol per serving. Leaner than "Lean," "Extra Lean" is still not as lean as "Low."

•**Reduced, Less, Fewer** — Means a diet product contains 25% less of a nutrient or calories. For example, hotdogs might be labeled "25% less fat than our regular hotdogs."

•**Light/Lite** — Means a diet product with 1/3 fewer calories or 1/2 the fat of the original. "Light in Sodium" means a product with 1/2 the usual sodium.

•**More** — A food in which 1 serving has at least 10% more of the Daily Value of a vitamin, mineral or fiber than usual.

•**Good Source Of** — One serving contains 10-19% of the Daily Value for a particular vitamin, mineral or fiber.

Food Labeling and the Law

by Pat Moriarty, R.D.*

Food labels will have a new look in the not-too-distant future. Both the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have embarked on a major effort to improve the content and format of food labels.

Health-conscious consumers who look to the label for information on selecting a nutritious diet will be pleased with all the new "food for thought."

USDA & FDA Regulate Labeling

Most people don't realize that food labeling is regulated by TWO different federal agencies. The USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) regulates the labeling of meat and poultry products. The FDA (part of the Department of Health and Human Services) regulates all other foods.

History of Current Changes

Arriving at a decision about the look and content of the new food label took years of work and represented input from many groups in addition to

USDA and FDA. The Congress, consumer groups, health professionals, the food industry and private citizens all made their voices heard.

The current label reform movement began in 1989. Over the next few years, USDA and FDA jointly sponsored a labeling study,* held public hearings and worked closely on their labeling positions to harmonize content and format as much as possible.

The NLEA Law

The Nutrition Labeling and Education Act (NLEA), passed by Congress in 1990, requires disclosure of nutrition information for most foods under FDA's jurisdiction.

In early 1991, USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) announced that it too would develop a mandatory nutrition labeling program for PROCESSED MEAT AND POULTRY. Much of 1991 and 1992 was devoted to issuing proposed regulations, analyzing comments on these proposals and rewriting the regulations based on the thousands of comments reviewed.

Both FSIS and FDA issued their final food labeling regulations on January 6, 1993.

The NLEA also mandates a public education campaign on the new labels to help consumers interpret them. FSIS and FDA are jointly developing a far-reaching, three-year campaign with help from a broad coalition of public and private-sector groups.

Not All Products Will Have Nutrition Labels

Consumers should be aware that not every food product will be required to carry a nutrition label. FSIS has planned a VOLUNTARY nutrition labeling program for RAW, SINGLE INGREDIENT meat and poultry products like beef roasts and raw chicken breasts.

FDA has a similar VOLUNTARY labeling program for the 20 most popular varieties of FRESH FISH, FRUITS and VEGETABLES.

Both agencies have exempted certain products from mandatory nutrition labeling. Some of the products exempted are those served in restaurants and purchased at delicatessens, and those sold in small packages and produced by small businesses.

New Labels Debut in 1993-1994

Consumers may begin to see these new labels in 1993. By law, however, manufacturers of meat and poultry products have until July 1994 to comply with the new food labeling laws. The deadline is a bit earlier for FDA-regulated products: May 1994. ♦

* The National Academy of Sciences, Food and Nutrition Board, *Nutrition Labeling: Issues and Directions for the 1990s*.

* Registered Dietitian

Who Needs Help

Interpreting the New

Nutrition Labels & Why

by Mary Ann Parmley

While some 70 to 80% of consumers now regularly read and interpret package labels fairly well,* there are others who will need special help to make dietary gains from the new nutrition labels.

Who are they and how can we help?

Researchers discussed this problem at the NEFLE (National Exchange for Food Labeling Education) conference held in Washington, D.C., September 1992. NEFLE is a joint effort by USDA and FDA supporting government and private efforts to promote informed label use.

Profiling uncertain label users

Dr. Brenda Derby, from FDA's Consumer Studies branch, said those who have difficulty using the new nutrition labels tend to be older and less educated than more successful label readers.

Even members of this group on doctor-restricted diets often can't interpret labels well enough to get the information they need. In fact they do less well

than people making self-directed diet changes.

The chief stumbling blocks, said Derby, appear to be lack of interest and difficulty translating nutrition data into actual diet decisions. For example, some thought 20 grams of fat was low but 300 mg of sodium was high based just on the numbers. The opposite is true—20 grams of fat is nearly $\frac{1}{3}$ the daily allowance while 300 mg of sodium is just $\frac{1}{8}$ the allowance (see nutrition panel p. 6).

How are successful label readers different?

Dr. Susan Welsh, with USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service, said the most successful (accurate) label users tend to be educated women living with others. They are knowledgeable about nutrition. Incidentally, this group also has a diet richer in Vitamin C and lower in cholesterol.

How can we help the less successful label readers?

Dr. Derby concluded that the task is not only to reach them with more nutrition knowledge, but to try to influence them to use that knowledge by promoting an understanding of the role diet plays in health and longevity.

How can we motivate health change?

In a presentation that earned her a standing ovation, Dr. Sharyn Sutton, from the National Cancer Institute, emphasized that health communicators are going to have to change their approach before they can succeed in helping Americans improve their diets.

From the motivational standpoint, the problem, Sutton said, is that we've been using a "medical model" of knowledge transfer to try to convince people to change their eating habits. The assumption has been that, just as scientists adapt their work to new knowledge, consumers would move from acceptance of new "scientific truths" to changed, healthier behavior.

Of course, that doesn't happen easily even in the scientific world, and it definitely does not happen in everyday life.

"Public health educators," Sutton said, "need to learn from the advertisers how to get people to do things."

Calling this new approach "Consumer-based Health Communications," Sutton said that to motivate change you must first define for people a **personal** benefit. Instead of saying "Americans need to lower fat consumption to 30 percent or less for health reasons," you must identify a reward that **grabs** the consumer emotionally.

* National Food Processors Association, *Food Labeling & Nutrition - What Americans Want*, Jan. 31, 1990.

In Madison Avenue terms, Sutton said, products are marketed based on a formula that seeks specific behavior change and offers the consumer a definite reward. She offered this example: "If you buy Glosso soap (new behavior), instead of Blah-o soap (old behavior), you will meet the man of your dreams (benefit)."

In dietary terms, then, you could say: If you choose fresh veggies (new) more often than french fries (old), you can lose weight and feel in control of your life (benefits).

The advertising formula to sell the dietary change moves the consumer not by reminding him or her of the health consequences of the change (protection from heart disease and cancer) but by offering rewards (weight loss, control) the consumer wants now.

The limitations of labels

You have to take the message beyond the label, Sutton advised. Because labels are just a list, a first step. They give "contents" and "grams." It's up to educators and communicators to interpret those values as personal health benefits real people want.

Communicators need to know more about their audiences

Of course, to really reach people you need more than slogans, however clever. Sutton said health educators need to know far more than they often

do about each segment of the total audience to understand what motivates them.

You need a clear picture of that well-educated woman who reads labels carefully if you're going to convince her she's not getting enough calcium and that she's still eating too much fat—true of most American women. If you don't know what makes her tick, you can't sell her on increasing calcium or tracking grams of fat to lower her daily intake.

Likewise, you need to know how the older Hispanic man thinks about food and health before you can help him learn to find the sodium information he may need to control his high blood pressure.

In both cases, the "trick" is to get inside the audience's heads through interviews and focus groups and learn what they perceive as the real rewards for changing longterm behavior.

Reaching hard-to-reach groups

Dr. Cheryl Achterberg, from Penn State University's Nutrition Center, introduced a new concept when she explained that, for everyone, there are three kinds of literacy:

- Text literacy—the familiar grade-level at which you read,
- Document literacy—the ability to interpret charts, tables, maps, etc., and
- Quantitative literacy—the ability to read and use numbers, graphs, metrics and math statements.

Document and math literacy are crucial to nutrition label reading. Unfortunately, these skills normally fall 2 grade levels behind text literacy. So someone who reads at the 7th-grade level, the new national norm, only has chart and math ability at the 5th-grade level.

Add to this the recent finding that 1 in 8 Americans is functionally illiterate, and you begin to see the scope of the problem in nutrition label education, or indeed, in any sort of public education project.

How to overcome these problems?

Like Sutton, Achterberg said the key is to simplify your message. Studies show people can absorb just three messages at a time, and they remember the first and last items best.

So nutrition education, vital for the reduction of several of the nation's biggest killers like heart disease, cancer and stroke, will have to be "fed" to the public in a series of education campaigns, each campaign carefully focused on a single prevention area.

It will be, everyone agreed, an infinitely worthwhile but longterm endeavor. ♦

For more information, contact the new Food Labeling Education Information Center at USDA's National Agricultural Library, Beltsville, Md. The Center is developing a computer database on nutrition education research and information efforts. Gina McNeal (301/504-5719) is the project coordinator.

NEFLE News

The Latest Pubs & Videos

by Joan Troiano

The new NEFLE effort has gotten off to a good start. NEFLE — the National Exchange for Food Labeling Education — is an informal organization made up of government, consumer, health and private industry groups. The goal is to help consumers understand the new food labels due out in 1994 and learn how to use them for more healthful diets.

As part of the NEFLE effort, USDA and FDA have established a database in the Food and Nutrition Information Center at USDA's National Agricultural Library. The database contains information about many label education projects that are currently being developed.

We've described a few of them here so that you can order copies.

- **"Read the Label, Set a Healthy Table: An Introduction to the New Food Label,"** from FDA and FSIS, introduces the new food label and explains important features in simple terms. The 8-page pamphlet opens up into a 16" x 18" poster on "Nutrition Facts."

Availability: Late Spring.
Cost: FREE

Order from: USDA-FSIS, Room 1165-S, Washington, D.C. 20250.

- **"Reference for Using Food Labels to Follow the Dietary Guidelines,"** from USDA's Human Nutrition Information Service, is designed for Extension agents and other professionals who write for consumers.

Chapters on each of the 7 dietary guidelines identify important dietary guidance issues, pinpoint audiences most at nutritional risk and cover food label features useful in helping consumers follow the dietary guidelines.

Availability: Summer 1993.

For more information, contact: Etta Saltos, 301-436-5194.

- **"How to Read the New Food Label,"** a brochure from the American Heart Association (AHA) in cooperation with FDA, shows consumers how to reduce the risk of heart disease by using the new food label in diet planning. Contains a large visual of a label and basic explanations of key concepts. Available in English and Spanish.

Availability: June 1993.

Cost: Could vary by AHA affiliate.

Order from: Your local AHA affiliate or call 214-706-1220.

- **"Understanding Food Labels,"** a revised brochure from the American Dietetic Association (ADA), will help consumers master the new food labels.

Availability: Now available.

Cost: FREE (single copies); bulk orders (\$4.89 per 25 brochures).

Order from: ADA, 800-366-1655.

- The **"New LEAN Toward Health,"** an updated booklet from ADA's National Center for Nutrition and Dietetics (NCND), helps consumers interpret fat, saturated fat and cholesterol listings on the new food label.

Availability: Now available.

Cost: FREE (single copies); bulk orders (\$5.00 per 25 booklets), make check payable to the ADA Foundation.

Order from: Single copies, NCND's Consumer Nutrition Hotline, 800-366-1655; bulk orders, the ADA Foundation, P.O. Box 4729, Dept. L1, Chicago, Ill. 60680-4729.

- **"Smart Selections for Healthy Eating: Using the New Food Label,"** a 6-minute videotape and booklet by Public Voice for Food and Health Policy and the Campbell Soup Company, is designed for consumers and health educators. The video describes the new label in easy-to-understand language and explains how it can be used to make good health an everyday priority.

Availability: Now available.

Cost: \$4.95 (video/booklet). Make check or money order payable to Smart Selections.

Order from: Smart Selections Video, P.O. Box 964, Bensalem, Penn. 19020. 800-352-SMART.

- **"Label Facts for Healthful Eating,"** from the National Food Processors Association, is a food labeling education kit. It contains:
 - An educator's resource guide with labeling background information, research summaries, communication and education activities, a food labeling glossary and a list of additional resources;
 - 2 consumer brochures explaining the new food label and daily values and reproducible fact sheets on carbohydrates, fiber, special diets and more.

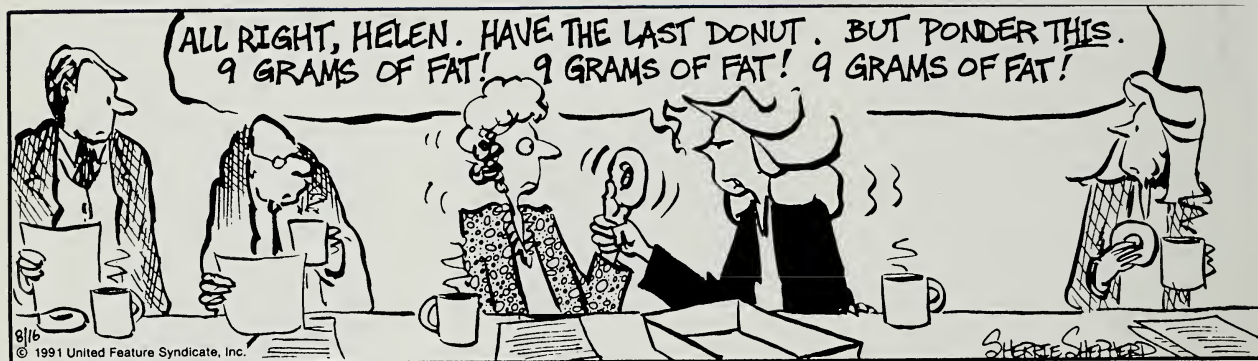
Availability: June 1993.

Cost: \$16.95 - consumer kit (brochures/factsheets); \$24.95 - educator's kit (brochures/factsheets/resource guide).

Order from: The Mazer Corporation, 2501 Neff Road, Dayton, Ohio 45414, 513-276-6181, ext. 216. ❖

Label...What Label?

by Herb Gantz



"Who, me, read a label? Not on your life," said the harried mother at the grocery.

"Read a label? I simply don't care," another shopper blurted out as he charged down the aisle.

"Food labels? I don't understand them," said a third person looking for a box of crackers.

If this is how **you** feel about label reading, you are not alone! A recent survey showed that 19 percent of the American population buys food without reading labels.* They are simply **not motivated**.

These consumers cite many reasons for this lack of interest—they're too busy, they doubt the claims made, they get their nutrition information from other sources, they don't understand the label...and on and on.

Are these reasons or excuses? It hardly matters. From what we know about the health effects of nutrition today, everyone should be reading food labels. Label reading ranks right up there with fastening seat belts and not smoking.

Okay, we've said you **should** read food labels. But you still want to know why, right?

Let's take the best-case scenario. You're young and healthy. What have you got to worry about? Time. As every person gets older it becomes more and more important to realize that "you are what you eat."

As you age, the cumulative effect of diet is an important influence on your health and life expectancy.

So start reading those food labels. The sooner you do the better chance you'll have of s-t-r-e-t-c-h-i-n-g out those years of healthy middle and older age.

Now let's look at a less rosy scenario. If, like many Americans, you're moving into middle age, it's probably time to adopt a "preventive health strategy." And reading labels to learn more about what you eat is a good first step.

Why? Because long-term studies are showing that poor dietary habits can increase your risk for all four of our nation's "Big Killer" diseases—heart disease, cancer, stroke and diabetes.

We now have evidence to show that too much dietary fat contributes to all these problems. Elevated cholesterol in your blood can lead to heart disease and stroke. High sodium (salt) intake is linked to heart disease and stroke, particularly for those who are sodium-sensitive. And sugary, fatty foods contribute to obesity, which bodes ill generally.

There are other reasons for reading labels too. Say you have food allergies, think you should be getting more fiber or perhaps you'd just feel better if you could lose those extra pounds. A careful reading of food labels can help you in all those areas.

In a TV commercial for body toning, superstar Cher used to say "you can't lie to your thighs." You can't lie to your body in a nutritional sense either. That's the real reason for reading food labels. It's up to you. ♦

*National Food Processors Association study, *Food Labeling & Nutrition - What Americans Want*, Jan. 31, 1990.

Trisodium Phosphate—New Tool for Reducing Bacteria on Chicken

Chicken is a **staple** of the American diet. However, some 25 percent of birds leave processing plants with some detectable salmonella bacteria. The good news is that a new process using trisodium phosphate can reduce the incidence of salmonella to less than 5 percent.

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service, which carries out meat and poultry inspection, has approved trisodium phosphate (TSP), a common food ingredient, for use in poultry processing.

Food-grade TSP has been used for years in other foods. In processed cheese, it keeps the individual ingredients from separating.

How would TSP be used in a chicken plant? After passing USDA inspection, each bird would be chilled. Then the bird would be dipped into the TSP solution.

TSP does not alter the flavor, texture or appearance of chicken. And the processing cost is estimated at less than a penny per bird. Poultry processors can now opt to use TSP in their operations.

NOTE: While TSP reduces salmonella on chicken, it will not eliminate bacteria completely. Bacteria can also find their way to raw chicken after it leaves the plant, so chicken and other raw products will continue to need careful handling.

If you need more information on TSP or the safe handling of other meat and poultry products, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline at 800-535-4555, 10 to 4 weekdays, Eastern Time. Washington, D.C. area residents call 202-720-3333.

—Joan Troiano

E. coli Alert

These days it's important to "look before you bite" to make sure hamburger or any other meat you or your family eat is **thoroughly** cooked. Check with a fork to make sure the meat is done all the way through with no pink showing.

Why is this necessary? A series of *E. coli* outbreaks in our western states have underscored the need for extra care. You may have heard about the Jack in the Box and Sizzler restaurant incidents. There has also been an outbreak involving raw milk in the same region.

These outbreaks were caused by a rare strain of the common *E. coli* bacteria—*E. coli* O157:H7. The O157 bacteria survived incomplete cooking in hamburger patties at Jack in the Box and made people sick. The Sizzler problem may be linked to O157-contaminated mayonnaise. In the third case, raw, unpasteurized milk is never considered safe. It has not been heated to temperatures high enough to kill harmful bacteria.

How can you protect yourself? There is one never-fail defense—cooking kills the O157 bacteria. Of course cooking kills most other bacteria too. So stay safe by following these **FOOD RULES**.

NEVER DRINK or cook with **RAW MILK**. It can contain a number of bacteria that can cause foodborne illness.

SEND BACK any **UNDERCOOKED** hamburger, meatloaf, meatballs, veal patty or other dish made from ground meat or poultry.

SHOPPING & COOKING AT HOME

- After shopping, quickly freeze or refrigerate perishable food.
- **USE** refrigerated hamburger, patties and poultry in 1-2 days.



- **WASH** your hands with hot, soapy water before preparing food or eating, particularly after using the bathroom or diapering a child.
- **WASH** your hands, utensils and work areas before and after contact with raw meat, poultry or fish.
- **COOK** ground meat and all poultry until the center is no longer pink. Juices should run clear.
- **MICROWAVE** carefully. For a low-wattage oven, cook food longer or at a higher setting than the directions stipulate. Cover and rotate food for even cooking. Let food stand outside the oven after cooking if so directed. The food completes cooking as it stands.
- **CAUTION:** When **GRILLING**, remember that burgers or other patties which look cooked on the outside may still be underdone inside. Check for doneness by slicing to the center to make sure no pink color remains.
- **SERVE** cooked food with clean plates and utensils.

—Mary Ann Parmley

FOR MORE INFORMATION on safe food handling, call USDA's Meat and Poultry Hotline 800-535-4555, 10 to 4 weekdays, Eastern Time. Washington, D.C. area residents, call 202-720-3333. Or write Public Awareness, 1165 South Bldg., Washington, D.C. 20250.

In Our Summer Supplement

HOW TO STOP BACTERIA COLD

We're putting together a special Summer issue in a ready-to-reproduce format on

- What you need to know about *E. coli*, the bacteria that caused foodborne illness outbreaks in several western states
- What you need to know about *Cryptosporidium*, the bacteria that got into water supplies in Wisconsin
- How to keep your cutting board sanitary
- And what to do about everyday summer food handling at home and on outings.

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